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ABSTRACT

A literature review was conducted on the subject of dialogue. The review examined these topics: how professionals learn and come to reflect critically upon their practice through talk; the barriers that are embodied in prevalent communicative structures and dominant discourses that impede reflective learning through talk; and how these barriers can be minimized or overcome. The study found that the literature points to the potential promise of communication. It suggests that when professionals are encouraged to communicate their personal experience through the expressive language of their own narratives, authentic links can be made between the public world of rational theory and the private landscapes of lived experience. The literature supports dialogic relations in a community dedicated to reflective learning. The literature also points out a paradox: communication can stagnate the growth of an organization just as quickly as it can encourage it. Nonreflective tasks can perpetuate dysfunctional patterns of thinking, reproducing taken-for-granted beliefs and ways of posing and solving problems that limit rather than liberate professionals. Dialogue governed by current dominant rhetorics emphasizes formal knowledge and inhibits reflective learning. According to the literature, five steps can be suggested for organizations committed to reflective learning: (1) recognize the differences between talk that stagnates and talk that stimulates in organizations; (2) deconstruct narratives to find caps, contradictions, and limiting assumptions; (3) promote a learning environment by expressing and challenging these assumptions; (4) cooperate to create a truly collaborative community built upon trust and risk; and (5) foster active and continual critical reflection. (Contains 57 references.) (KC)

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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONALS' LEARNING: THE LIBERATORY AND LIMITING POTENTIAL OF DIALOGUE

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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PROFESSIONALS' LEARNING :

THE LIBERATORY AND LIMITING POTENTIAL OF DIALOGUE

A great deal of interest lately has been focused on the area of professionals' learning in the workplace. Baskett and Marsick (1992) characterize recent shifts in theorizing this area as a "virtual revolution" (p. 8). Increasing attention is being paid to the need to develop critically reflective professionals, practitioners who reflect on their own experiences and their knowing-in-action to rigorously question their own problem-solving processes, as well as their deep-lying assumptions and beliefs.

The site for reflective learning receiving the most focus appears to be the communicative process. Learning is increasingly viewed as an ongoing complex process occurring informally and incidentally largely through talk. Talk, however, is not always the vehicle for reflection-in-practice producing new knowledge and skills, or critical thinking about assumptions which create improved 'meaning perspectives'. Talk can also perpetuate dysfunctional patterns of thinking, reproducing taken-for granted beliefs and ways of posing and solving problems which limit rather than liberate professionals.

The barriers to critical reflection posed by language continue to perplex theorists and researchers, ensuring a continuing stream of writings to address the "problem". New literature deconstructs the ideologies imprisoning our understandings of the adult reflective learning process, critiques prevailing models of critical thinking, and prescribes methodologies to help professionals confront and dissolve "deformations and prejudices" (Greene, 1978, p.102), and reconstruct alternative ways of thinking and believing.

While the powerful role of talk to enable or restrict the learning process is only recently being acknowledged in the workplace, learning through dialogue has a long tradition in academic classrooms. Feminist critique of this dialogue has focused on current dominant rhetorics reifying formal knowledge and reproducing hegemonic ideology which inhibits critical reflection. Rational rhetoric inhibits the exploratory flow legitimizing personal experience, and allowing its connection to theory. Thus the classroom dialogue divorces learners' lifeworld experiences from the body of formal, rational knowledge privileged through

the dominant discourse. When learning is thus fragmented and alienated from the self, individuals become trapped in webs of meaning that control and subvert their thinking.

Feminists have also argued for reconfiguration of learning environments to dismantle assymetrical power relations which oppress students under the authority of the professional and curriculum. A call has arisen to make space in classrooms for the "voices" of the silent, those gendered, raced, and classed groups rendered "voiceless" under the hegemony of prevailing ideologies and interpersonal power structures. When access to talk is denied, the knower becomes severed from the key means of coming to know. Reflective learning is rendered impossible in such conditions.

In this paper, parallels will be shown between the workplace and the academic classroom. The objective is to apply useful understandings about both opportunities and barriers to reflective learning emerging from critique of dialogue in academic classrooms to the learning environment created by the workplace. First, however, the paper will present recent theory and research on professionals' ways of learning through critical reflection. The specific focus is dialogue, about which the following central questions are addressed:

1. How do professionals learn and come to reflect critically upon their practice through talk?

2. What barriers embodied in prevalent communicative structures and dominant discourses impede reflective learning through talk?

3. What can be done to minimize or eliminate these barriers?

Professionals' Ways of Knowing

New Understandings

Literature addressing professionals' ways of knowing characterizes it as "long, circuitous, and far more circumscribed and holistic" (Baskett, and Marsick, 1992, p. 12) than conventional wisdom would suppose. New understandings about professionals' learning are challenging traditional pre-professional academic training programs: professionals' "practical" knowledge is separate from yet more useful than their formal knowledge (Lave, 1988; Sternberg and Wagner, 1986); their knowledge comes not from formal sources but from people in interaction with the problems presented by their environment (Hunt, 1987; Boud and

Griffin, 1987); only a small part of the different kinds of knowledge (people, situation, process, control, practice, and concepts) developed and valued by professionals is learned formally (Eraut, 1988); resources for learning are wide-ranging and often used unconsciously (Baskett, 1983; Marsick and Watkins, 1990); and the cycle of professionals' learning is long and complex, embracing personal and environmental domains, and including formal pre-professional and inservice continuing education as only one small part of the process (Fox, Maxmanian and Putnam, 1989).

Recent inquiry is examining how professionals actually learn their practical, often tacit knowledge (Jarvis, 1992), how practitioners harness implicit knowing through talk to improve their practice (Boreham, 1992), how learning occurs through workplace partnerships mediated by talk (Lovin, 1992), and how societal and cultural factors influence professionals' learning (Knox, 1992). In summarizing the work of several recent writers, Baskett, Marsick, and Cervero (1992) identify six polar issues emerging in theory addressing ways professionals' learn their practice in the workplace: the individual versus the collective as a site of learning; rational versus intuitive, and cognitive versus emotional modes of learning; routine versus nonroutine situations of learning; formal versus informal education; and constructed versus scientific knowledge. It is unfortunate that these issues, while promising for fruitful future inquiry, are still portrayed as binary oppositions, belying a continuing either-or philosophy, an apparent search for a one-best-way approach to professionals' learning. This search appears to have become consolidated in a priority focused on "critical reflection", alternatively termed "reflective learning", "reflection-in-action", "transformative learning", "informal and incidental learning", and "generative learning" by various writers.

Reflective Learning of Professionals

A great deal of writing is focused on the importance and functions of critical reflection in the day-to-day learning of professionals. Writers such as Argyris (1993), Pierce (1991), Marsick and Watkins (1990), Brookfield (1987), and Schon (1983, 1987) have shown how practitioners experience profound learning when they scrutinize their own processes and premises of thinking to uncover those 'blind spots' and 'taken-for-granted' assumptions which perpetuate dysfunctional thinking and behavior patterns. A key focus of this literature is exploring ways to help practitioners interrupt their ordinary thinking patterns in order to confront, critique, and liberate their own thinking from paralysing deep structures and the defensive routines which Argyris (1993) claims they use to protect these structures.

Argyris (1993) defines workplace learning as "the process of detecting error". He challenges professionals to engage in "double-loop learning", questioning the assumptions underlying their problem-solving processes and thus avoiding "single-loop learning" which simply reinforces routinized and sometimes ineffective patterns of thinking, behaving, and problem-solving. Argyris's often-cited example is that of a thermometer: single-loop learning is like measuring the room's temperature against that set on the thermometer and making adjustments accordingly; double-loop learning is questioning where the thermometer is set to begin with. Argyris also emphasizes the discrepancy between individuals' "theories-in-use" which govern their actual workplace problem-solving processes, and their "espoused theories" which comprise their formal knowledge as well as organizational norms and beliefs about how things should be done. Through talk, he argues, these discrepancies can be surfaced and compared with others' personal constructions of events, or at least critically examined to imagine alternatives. Argyris (1993) suggests that when people are assisted to interrupt their habits of inference and thinking, they can locate the paradoxes and gaps, and reconstruct more effective and inclusive theories-in-use. People's cognitive frames protecting their tacit assumptions can be mapped, through talk. These maps help individuals examine their own self-reinforcing reasoning and repetitive patterns of action strategies which often lead to unintended dysfunctional consequences, trace the influence of their underlying values and theories-in-use governing these patterns, and recognize the defensive routines they employ to protect their frames. Through talk, individuals can devise an alternate "reflective" framing orientation whereby they unearth and bring into consciousness their underlying assumptions, premises, and criteria of interpreting the events around them, examine their methods of forming personal theories, and reframe their construction of reality and their understandings of problems related to their practice.

This process has certain parallels with the theory of transformative learning proposed by Mezirow, where individuals question not only the processes they deploy to solve their problems but also the premises, through critical reflection. The intent is to restructure underlying patterns of assumptions and values, which Mezirow (1990) terms "meaning perspectives", in order to create improved meaning perspectives which are "more inclusive, permeable, discriminating, and integrative" (p.14).

Schon (1983) also urges professionals to unearth the assumptions limiting their perspective on problems to focus on 'problem-framing'. "Reflection-in-action", explains Schon (1983), is a naturally occurring cognitive process through which the professional solves problems and analyses the procedures and strategies of that process. The deeper levels of critical reflection emerge through a trigger of surprise, a disorienting dilemma which catalyses a re-thinking of the whole problem-solving process. The consequences of such critical reflection are bound to a re-positioning of the problem:

> When the phenomenon at hand eludes the ordinary categories..presenting itself as unique or unstable, the practitioner may surface and criticise his [sic] initial understanding of the phenomenon, construct a new description of it, and test the new description by an on-the-spot experiment... When he finds himself stuck in a problematic situation which he cannot readily convert to a manageable problem, he may construct a new way of setting the problem - a new frame which, in what I shall call a "frame experiment", he tries to impose on the situation. (p. 63)

These words imply an endeavour to establish control over problems, a technical-rational approach to building practical knowledge. Schon's (1983) taken-for-granted assumptions that fluid reality and subtle interactions can all be molded into problems impose a shape which, while rendering that reality manageable, also limits the empowered critical thinker to use a deficit model to construct solutions, without apparently engaging in the hermeneutics grounding deep reflection. Collaboration is not explored in Schon's (1983) explanation of "reflection-in-action", nor are contextual considerations considered such as socio-cultural influences, timing, and differing goals.

Like Schon, Pierce (1991) points to well-publicized professional errors such as the Challenger disaster to emphasize that rigorous questioning of assumptions through reflection is a critical issue for today's workplace learning. Although she acknowledges the power of critical reflection in emancipating workers, she focuses on "improved organizational effectiveness in terms of productivity and profit" (p. 427).

The view of reality governed by these approaches to professionals' learning confines events, actions, communicative interactions, dilemmas, memories, insights, interpretations, affective reactions, and other experiences of the learning individual, to a rational structure composed of problems, which can then be deconstructed through critical reflection. The difficulty with this problem-solving window is that it limits discourse about critical reflection to reasoning, rational thought processes. Important dimensions of affective and intuitive understandings are underplayed or ignored, and exploratory open-ended growth processes are potentially excluded in favor of the rational certainty and closure demanded by problem-solving processes. The possibility of learning in the collaborative context of community receives no attention. Furthermore, the primacy of the organization's productivity, a theme occurring throughout the work of Argyris, Marsick and Watkins, and Pierce, distorts the project of "liberating" the individual through critical reflection into a reproduction of assymetrical power relations, where the individual is subordinated to serve the organization's needs and goals, and learning becomes a site of control for organizational gain.

Informal and Incidental Learning

Marsick and Watkins (1991) draw upon the work of Schon, Argyris, and others to present a theory of professionals' informal (intentional) and incidental (usually unintentional) learning, which they describe as an ongoing and natural function of everyday communicative interactions in any organization. Their theory explains that individuals in the workplace learn by either confirming or by transforming existing beliefs and understandings, although their focus is developing ways to assist professionals to dig beneath those taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs which paralyse creative problem-solving and lead to dysfunctional outcomes. They propose several key dimensions significant in the processes of informal and incidental learning:

- Three characteristics of informal learning were found to be shared by professional educators: (1) awareness and learning; (2) use of resources; and (3) the difficulty of learning informally even when intentionally trying to learn.

- The three stages of consciousness ("magical" thinking, "naive" thinking, and "critical consciousness") are cited from Freire's work by Marsick and Watkins as a useful typology for understanding educators' stages of reflection.

- Three conditions enhance effectiveness of both informal and incidental learning: *Proactivity* (the readiness to take initiative and responsibility for personal learning,

involving the dimensions of autonomy and empowerment); *creativity* (the ability to think beyond one's normal point of view and to break out of preconceived patterns of thinking); and *critical reflectivity* (the ability to penetrate assumptions guiding one's own actions, question these vigorously, and then reframe one's understanding of the original problem) .

- The process of informal learning is based on the way problems in workplace experience are perceived as non-routine, "framed" according to a particular set of assumptions, then solved. Productive incidental learning involves "unfreezing", a stage in the process where the professional experiences a sense of dissonance which creates a readiness to learn. Marsick and Watkins represent incidental learning in the following model:

The potential for error in reasoning at any point in this learning is great, especially when the reasoning functions at a tacit, non-reflective level. Marsick and Watkins (1990) emphasize the role of talk in the process of illuminating those errors which inhibit the individual's ability to uncover deep meaning structures, and thus confront and change defensive routines enabling them to stay "blind" to invalid reasoning. When individuals dissolve and reconstruct everyday experiences, changing their choices and making these changes visible to others, they are "reconstructing irreversibility". That is, a dialectical learning process enacted through talk enables people to reflect critically on the deep structures which paralyse them in inconsistency, confront the defensive routines enabling them to stay blind to these inconsistencies, and thus begin moving towards a transformation of existing constructs.

Professionals' Learning: Issues for Consideration

A central issue preoccupying all of these writers: just how is critical reflection to be fostered? How do people become engaged in the hermeneutical cycle confronting, deconstructing, and transforming their existing "meaning perspectives"? Who or what provides the trigger, the "disorienting dilemma" prompting recognition of faulty reasoning, inaccurate inferences, inconsistent and paralysing patterns of thinking and acting? Each theorist presents techniques which essentially feature an external facilitator of some sort who apparently works with professionals (typically in a workshop situation, removed from the day-to-day exigencies of the practical workplace) to surface their assumptions and guide them through a process of thoughtful probing (Argyris, Marsick, and Pierce are all organizational consultants available to perform this service for a fee). The intent is presumably to enable

professionals to develop and routinize the regular "habit" of critical reflection, which they can then prompt themselves to enact.

This model is strongly reminiscent of classroom dynamics, where students are dependent on an external authority figure to trigger the reflection. Thus a cycle of assymetrical power relations is reproduced. Authentic learning in such a situation is dubious, and empowerment becomes superficial and manipulative, as the growing body of critical pedagogy will attest.

Meanwhile ethical questions emerge, related to ends and agendas: Who decides that professionals' meaning perspectives are inadequate? By what criteria are thinking patterns judged to be "faulty", "inconsistent", "paralysing", or "defensive"? Who determines the goals of critical reflection? Whose ends are truly being served? In an organization dedicated to productivity for profit, the answers to these questions preclude any genuine notion of individual growth -- growth towards connectedness between the self and the public world promoted not only by feminist writers but also in the growing body of workplace learning literature.

More questions are raised by the conceptualization of reflective learning as a rational act, subjugated entirely to the limitations and controls exercised by the cognitive domain. The rational self becomes artificially split away from the emotional, moral, physical, and intuitive realms of personhood. The notion that somehow these fragments can be re-glued back together in a project dedicated to "holistic" empowerment rings hollow.

Aside from these criticisms and despite the interesting new directions heralded by all this theorizing of professionals' ways of knowing, most continuing education practice still emphasizes pre-service and formalized inservice programs. These programs are largely formal, privileging the cognitive domain and avoiding the emotional and intuitive realms, focusing on individuals' rather than collective learning, and characterizing learning as acquiring, not actively constructing, a pre-determined body of techno-scientific knowledge and skills. The emphasis is rational and structural, the focus is training and glorifying the development of the autonomous individual, and learning is confined to the improvement of problem-solving. The academic classroom enacts many similarities to these formalized approaches to continuing education.

The intent here is not to debunk as impossible the models of critical reflection and the new conceptualizations of professionals' learning as informal and incidental described above, or propose a return to academic ways of fostering professionals' learning. Rather, parallels already existing in practice are being used to illustrate ways that insights gleaned from academic

contexts might inform dialogic learning in workplace settings. Besides the pedagogical parallels between academic and formal workplace learning contexts, the relational interactions and hierarchical structures of the academic classroom function similarly to those in an organization. The academy's discursive practices illuminate power relations, controlling narratives, interpretive gaps, adversarial arenas, and problematics related to the process of talk itself that are characteristic of any formal organization.

Feminist Perspectives on Learning

Feminist perspectives show ways to liberate genuine, " connected" learning through talk and writing in academic classrooms. These perspectives may offer alternative ways to conceptualize professionals' learning, ways that might be helpful in breaking free from the tradition of rational problem-solving by an autonomous individual prompted to reflect critically by an external agent and acting to serve the goals of a controlling and potentially oppressive workplace. Feminist literature highlights oppressive structures and practices that inhibit learning, and suggests alternate approaches which may liberate learners and thus facilitate more authentic, powerful ways of knowing. However, feminist pedagogy addressing adult learners still theorizes from within the academy, and does not provide explicit analysis of the workplace situation.Yet there appear to be lessons here for the workplace which, when applied cautiously to avoid an overly-artificial meld between liberatory academic practice and the different sorts of constraints, desired outcomes, and values governing workplace learning, may still yield new and better orientations for facilitating professionals' learning.

Ideal situations for learning presuppose the freedom of the learner, from intrapsychic, interpersonal, and extra-structural barriers to discovery. In both classrooms and workplace, hierarchical power structures grant authority to the professional or superordinate, rendering the student or employee dependent. Even in the case of relatively autonomous professionals, the organizational context presents ruling structures and regulations which are oppressive and controlling, interfering with complete freedom to make choices according to demands of practice. The subordinate has two choices: remain compliant or resist the dominant power figures, which reproduces the assymetrical power relations either through submission or by perpetuating a cycle of resistance and defense. Workplaces are governed by the same oppressive procedures and routines limiting individuals' freedom to think and act in academic contexts: performance assessment controlled by the dominant power group; the competitive ethic; and rule-bound norms asserting control. These mechanisms can all foster anxiety, alienation from others, fear of failure, and dependency on external control. Obvious barriers

are thus presented to learning, since genuine learning requires trust and freedom to take risks, make and acknowledge mistakes, and share ideas in an open community of mutual reciprocity.

The communicative relations dominating academic classrooms are still based primarily in lecture / passive listening. Classrooms attempting to foster critical reflection or transformative learning among students are often structured as discursive seminars dominated by critical dialogue conducted in large- or small-group settings. Formal literature is read to ingest theoretical positions examine competing points of view. Formal writing is demanded of students, to be modelled upon rigid structural formats and submitted as products for grading. Some experimentation with journal writing is occurring in certain "progressive" and feminist classrooms, but such expressive writing is still largely marginalized in both time and weighting in the assessment process. The privileged rhetoric in traditional academic classrooms, like that in workplaces, is still a techno-rationalist attempt to attain objectivity.

Some would argue that the hegemonic ideology embedded in North American academic curriculum and workplace cultures is Eurowestern, privileging the values and beliefs of dominant groups; assuming the existence of one universal reality; reifying the notion of an autonomous, self-determined, self-seeking individual; defining only those propositions and perspectives considered valid in this objective reality; and making all other ideas and ways of knowing disappear, by rendering the unnamed invisible. Thus alternate perspectives cease to exist and diversity is impossible: not only are non-dominant groups silenced, but the learning of all is confined to the narrow tube of the dominant ideology. Karger (1993) shows that the dominant rhetoric of the academy is argumentative, objective, and rational, emphasizing hyper-correction and judgment over experimentation and inquiry, demanding control and mastery of content and form, and suppressing the personal and exploratory. Parallels with the discourses and rhetoric privileged in workplaces are evident, with equally repressive effects on the questioning and risk-taking required to learn. Both academy and workplace emphasize product over process, imposed timelines over individual rhythms, the public and objective over the personal and idiosyncratic. The operative paradigm of both is a positivist, techno-rational goal-oriented reality. In such an environment, authentic communication is alienated and learning severely limited. Links between personal, idiosyncratic knowing and the formal body of public, "scientific" authorized for discussion and practice is severed.

These conclusions are depressing in light of the optimistic programs for reflective learning, as envisioned by Marsick and Watkins, Pierce, Schon, Argyris, and Mezirow. How can an organization be reconfigured to enable the individual professional's empowerment through owning personal, practice knowledge; drawing upon creativity; and being liberated

from defensive routines and paralysing patterns of habitual yet dysfunctional thinking and feeling? Particularly, since such learning is largely predicated upon talk, how can talk promoting learning be emancipated in an organization?

A response to this question calls for a return to basic understandings of the role language plays in constructing knowledge. Three views will be explored, the interpretive-symbolic, the post-structuralist, and the narrative perspective (derived from the interpretive-symbolic), towards reclaiming the possibility of an epistemology of talk, as well as revisiting patterns, ideologies, relationships, and barriers governing conversation to illuminate their influences upon learning.

How Knowledge is Created Through Language

The Interpretive-Symbolic View

Interpretive theorists show how our meanings are constructed through interactional processes. They also show that these meanings , invoked through words, symbols, and actions, constitute social reality (Smircich, 1983; Putnam, 1983; Trujillo, 1983; Weick, 1983). As Mumby (1988) states, "reality is fundamentally linguistic in nature. Social phenomena are called into being through their 'naming' in language. They only reach fruition as meaningful human events when they are interpolated (addressed) by social actors" (p. 96). People produce and reproduce meaning through the narratives comprising their interaction.

Symbolic interactionists show that our language, exercised through the manipulation of symbols, is substance. Located in an interpretive paradigm, they view the subjective individual as the prime meaning-maker, constructing a private reality through perceptions that are made concrete through the structures and signs of language. Bormann (1983) defines communication as "the human social processes by which people create, raise, and sustain group consciousness" (p. 100) which comprises organizational reality. His theory of symbolic convergence explains the way two or more private worlds, created through an interpretation of experience through the symbols of language, touch and interweave to create a common consciousness. Tompkins (1987) shows that all perceived truth is in fact symbol, that the discussion of the symbols used to construct reality is conducted through symbol: "our departmental theorizing is but a genealogy of intertextualities ... there is nothing outside of symbolism we can talk about -- without symbolism" (p.94).

This position appears to be making its way into understandings of organizations. Haughey (1993) shows that communication is not the simple act of giving and getting information. Instead, communication is the way members construct their community. Dialogue shapes how people think about and react to something. Through this thinking and reacting, people invent reality by their selection of what is named and the way they describe it to one another. The meanings of each communicator, constructed through past experience interpolated with the organization, provide "counterpoints" to the meanings of the other players in the dialogue. As a result, the act of knowing is a moment-to-moment negotiation between the individual's personal understandings, which are shaped by the social context and relations, and the socially constructed organizational "stock of knowledge" that is represented through the language of other dialogue participants. Drawing from Greenfield's ideas, Haughey shows the process to be value-laden. "Facts" are valued ideas; we value our facts and tend to consider our values as givens. From a teaching/ learning context, Crowley (1989) states: "Knowledge is a highly contextualized activity which is constructed within groups, community, or societies; . . . knowledge itself is a volatile construct, subject to alteration when contexts for knowing are altered" (p. 45-46).

The Post-Structural View

Post-structuralists, often invoking Derrida (1978), Lyotard (1989) and Giddens (1984), also argue against the illusion that language is a technical device for establishing a single, stable meaning for reality. Instead, these post-structuralists create a world for language that works from presuppositions quite different from the world of the functionalists. In this world, reality is in fact a text created through language by the meaning-maker. Language symbols cannot be matched logically to the world. A word has no direct relationship to a phenomenon; it only bears meaning as it is distinguished from other words. A word used to describe an event in one context may shift to take a new meaning in a different context. The text developing from interwoven discourse is context-bound and bears stable meaning only to the constructing and interpreting participants. Every text contains conflicts between different authorial voices and is therefore undecidable. Each version of the text is incomplete because it engages in certain exclusions.

Usher (1989) states that

"language is neither a mirror of reality nor merely a tool for understanding it but constitutes the experience of reality. Reality does not stand outside language and guarantee it

with prior meanings, that is to say, it does not contain intrinsic meanings which language merely reflects. Language and within language discourses contain the meanings which allow us to interpret reality and thus our experience " (p. 29).

Usher goes on to show how the meaning of experience does not reside in an individual, but in the ephemeral, fluid nature of linguistic discourse. He contends that our sense of self, like other aspects of reality, is located within the signifiers (verbal or written labels of meaning) of our language. Thus, like all meaning, the self is also processual and temporary. Its meaning is construed and embedded within the discourse of a moment.

Making Meaning through Storying

An alternate but related approach to communication and learning is based on an understanding that human consciousness is created through narrative and story and resists an existential reality of fragments. We do not conceive our communicative processes as isolated message bits that we send, through a variety of intrapersonal and external filters, to an "other", a receiver who may or may not understand the truth of what we mean. Nor do we comfortably accept multiple and conflicting notions of reality as they are construed through our communication. Instead, each of us strives to construct a meaningful whole from the various interactions, events, and phenomena comprising our experiences both inside and outside our organizational life. The way we impose coherence is through story.

Clandinin and Connelly (1988) exemplify the position of narratologists when they state: "Humans are story-telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p.2). Story-telling is already commonly recognized for its constitutive importance in cultural views of organizations, but those who study the organization as an living organism need to go further to acknowledge the fundamental role of narrative structure in our ways of coming-to-know, thinking-through, and remembering which construct a total vision of reality. As Fisher (1984) shows, narration is not just one form of discourse, but is a paradigm for conceptualizing the communication process. He contends that humans can be seen as "homo narrans".

Narratologists believe that memory resides within the self, and our memories are stories of our experiences. Even single remembered images, apparently static and frozen in time, come to life as the story of a moment or collection of moments when we re-call memory into consciousness. We recall our lives as an autobiographical story, which embraces a complex series of stories. Events are given meaning through re-call with arbitrarily imposed beginnings,

middles, and ends punctuating and structuring what otherwise would be an intolerable living-through of fragmented and meaningless experiences.

In our storying, through intrapersonal or interpersonal language of these events, we selectively foreground certain details: everything else becomes invisible. When we demarcate an arbitrary beginning in time, other preceding events become antecedent action, and following events become related to the unity provided by the story structure. We are impelled to thematize, to imbue these story structures with a meaning that explains, moralizes, questions, resolves, and helps us to predict. People become characters in our personal stories, and their actions assume meaning and motive in a cause-effect narrative. Our selves are construed as central protagonists confronting dilemmas, no longer floating in a temporary and existential morass of vanishing language and conflicting fragmented reflections from others.

Once created, the stories exist as text in our consciousness, assuming a reality of their own and shaping our further thinking. Lampert (1985) found that professionals' conversations about the work dilemmas comprising their practice could best be understood as text. Elbaz (1983) also construed professionals' workplace learning as narrative, and described the texts emerging from his research as "practical knowledge". Storied text freezes events as a replayable video in our minds, where it becomes a reference point for future events. We construct people's behavior as new chapters, interpreted by the plots we have already spun for each character. We "restory" our experiences each time we revisit the memories, collapsing time and space, inverting sequences within and among stories, highlighting some details and ignoring others, but preserving the essential story structure. We can live in several stories at once, for while constructing a present narrative we can simultaneously be engaging with past narratives or imagining future scenarios, reliving these stories as a present reality and interpolating them with one another. While we live through new experiences and interactions, we contextualize them as stories, new or continuations. Thus we invent reality through our stories, told aloud or relived imaginatively, and our stories provide us with the sense of unity and coherence we need to make sense of the world.

Clandinen and Connelly (1987) show how humans, and particularly professionals, make meaning of their experience, holistically and contextually, through narrative. They use the term "personal practical knowledge" to describe professionals' knowing. Personal practical knowledge is defined as "a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of the present situation" (p. 25). This knowledge resides in the mind, body, past experience, and future plans of practice. Linstead and Grafton-Small (1988) state that our everyday and organizational experiences are ultimately all fictional,

mediated through perception, memory, interest, social experience, and language. Where our fictions are verbalized, they compete with others' fictions in an "intertextuality" where our stories are confirmed, disconfirmed, or re-created by our audience in an endless possibility of meanings.

Surfacing and Owning Personal Practical Knowledge Through Talk

The personal experience of a professional, which lies at the core of "personal, practical knowledge", often remains tacit. Writers addressing the process of becoming critically reflective stress that a first step towards emancipation from restrictive deep-seated assumptions and beliefs is to bring this experience into consciousness. Habermas (1984) shows that people often feel separated from their own "lifeworld" (those private experiences lived moment-to-moment in everyday practice) when they recognize its apparent incompatibility with the "systems world" (the public realm of regulations and prevailing beliefs). The dominant rational discursive practices of the systems world de-legitimizes personal experience in denying it a voice.

Feminist theorists have alerted adult educators to the need to recover this personal knowledge, allowing space and alternate discourses to help individuals validate and name their subjective experience (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986; Maher and Tetreault, 1992; Ellsworth, 1989). The central goal is a movement towards connectedness and integration of reason and intuition. Although derived from models of women's ways of knowing, these understandings have rich implications for enabling the learning of all professionals, transcending gender divisions. Loughlin and Mott (1992) produce three findings from research applying models of women's ways of knowing in the workplace, which they suggest are not gender-based but rather apply to the continuing professional learning of both men and women:

1. Learning involves critical reflection and action includes a knowing centred in authenticity
2. This learning leads to the construction of knowledge that motivates action
3. This type of learning is a relational process within the context of the concrete experiences of daily living.

Tarule (1988) explains that the process of reflective learning must start with a recognition and legitimation of personal experience. This recognition and legitimation of personal experience must happen before meaningful connections can be made between these life experiences and theoretical knowledge and between the experiences of oneself and those of

others. Hart (1990) believes that a perceptual shift occurs in a transformative moment of conscientization when an individual owns and understands personal experience. The process of understanding is secured through talk: "only by sharing their previously simply idiosyncratic feelings could [people] validate those feelings as subjective experience -- as something that really and truly happened to them and was therefore not a hallucination or a figment of the brain" (p. 56).

Karger (1993) argues that narrative provides the alternate discourse required to liberate learning through critical reflection on subjective experience, providing a personal, integrative, non-combative, non-adversarial rhetoric. Britton (1970) theorizes that individuals use language as their principal instrument to recognize and understand what they already know as well as to make new knowledge part of themselves. He describes "expressive" language as a mode through which individuals explore their world views through an exploratory, idiosyncratic system of symbols and form personal constructs comprising their knowledge. New experiences and views are transformed and integrated through expressive language into a representation and "from this representation, this cumulative record of our own past, we generate expectations concerning the future; expectations which, as moment by moment the future becomes the present, enable us to interpret the past" (p. 12). A key consideration is Britton's distinction of "expressive" language as being flexible, close to the speaker, and immediate. Unlike other modes of language, expressive language is best suited to personalization of information and new experiences, allowing individuals to integrate new experience into previous representations.

When professionals are granted public space to use the expressive language required to surface and make sense of their personal experience through narrative, they are empowered to view that experience as important. This recognition, producing the transformative "Ah" of remembrance and understanding described by Hart (1990), is a crucial beginning to critical questioning of the beliefs and assumptions constructing the individual's interpretation, their storying, of that experience.

Surfacing Tacit Knowing to Uncover Gaps in Thinking

If talk within an organization is to uncover gaps in thinking and transform experience, critical distance must be established from this personal experience in order for individuals to examine and reconstruct it. Hart (1990) shows that "to get stuck in the personal is a danger that is nourished by a whole barrage of cultural and ideological forces" (p. 66). Cocks (1985) criticizes "an unreflective glorification of immediate life" (p. 178) and argues for the need to

depart from experience to achieve the necessary critical distance "to fathom aspects of the world hidden from the eyes of its own authors and actors" (p. 175).

Kelly (1953), from whom Britton's ideas are drawn, proposes that each individual intentionally strives to make sense of experience, predicting and controlling events, by creating representations or constructs which are then fitted over the world in an attempt to interpret it. These representations are continually reorganized in the light of new experience. This reorganization is the foundation of Mezirow's (1990) theory of transformative learning, positing that people assimilate new experiences into existing meaning perspectives which are made up of higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, goal orientations, and evaluations. This assimilation occurs in an interpretive process which either confirms, reinforces, or transforms these existing meaning perspectives.

Polanyi (1958) shares Kelly's view that humans are actively engaged in an attempt to understand the world they inhabit. Our tacit knowing is the knowledge and skills we possess as a consequence of the action of releasing past experiences as we attempt to work through our innate intention to comprehend the world leading us to discover and act. Language, Polanyi states, is the central means through which we connect tacit knowing to intention. He also describes the process of coming-to-know as "indwelling", where the particulars of experience become part of our subsidiary awareness as our focal awareness shifts to a consideration of the significance of ideas through language. When the vast range of our past life experiences forming our knowledge remains tacit, it colours our interpretation of what is currently in focus.

In the context of adult learning, Boreham (1992) uses Polanyi's theory to argue the need for professionals to make their tacit knowing explicit through language to uncover assumptions and thus locate faults in their thinking, to force focus, and to surface problem-solving processes. Schon (1983) also draws upon Polanyi in his theory of reflective learning through talk to surface professionals' tacit problem-solving processes and reframe the ways they pose these problems. Brookfield (1987) describes talk as the critical medium for clarifying professionals' tacit learning, making our ideas explicit and focusing our fuzzy thinking, structuring knowledge, and clarifying and owning our representations of our experiences. He explains that we make sense of a new concept through verbalizing it: we use talk for expanding and deepening meaning, inquiring into new content, linking personal knowledge (prior experience, feelings, and values) with new experiences, and building a view of self and world by thinking aloud. Hart (1992) goes further than Boreham, Schon, or Brookfield in her theory for professionals' learning of "subsistence knowing", built upon Polanyi's ideas. Hart posits that a dialectic must be created between the "indwelling", the tacit engagement of the knower

with the substance of the known, and a necessary critical distance. The movement of learning is back and forth from the particular to the general, the natural and the social, reason and emotion, critical judgement and empathetic intuition.

Bohm's conceptualization of dialogic learning is cited by Senge (1990) and by Haughey (1993) for its application to professionals' learning. Bohm claims that a major purpose of talk is to reveal the incoherence of our thoughts. He identifies three kinds of thinking which limit an individual's learning when unexposed to the interactive challenges afforded by dialogue. These three kinds of thinking include: (1) non-participative thought (unrecognized constraining structures), (2) programmed thought (where routines disengage reality), and (3) self-referential thought (where the criteria for the solution are those upon which the problem was framed, creating a closed circle of thinking). The verbalization of thought helps surface its own structures and limitations, and the interpolation of others' views can interrupt the closed circles preventing critical reflection.

The Significance of Dialogue in the Professionals' Learning Community

In the lives and relations of professionals and their world of work, dialogue goes beyond simple verbalizing as a medium for learning. Through dialogue professionals build relationships and construct networks of communities. From these networks evolve consensual meanings which embed certain values, norms of behaving and discoursing, and ideologies. These dialogues all influence and are influenced by the learning of any particular member of the community. As well, important affective, intuitive, and physical dimensions inhere in relational processes which affect learning.

Collective Learning Through Dialogue

A great deal of interest in collective learning, as well as the notions of learning generated through intersubjectivity and multiple realities interacting discursively, has been generated largely in the fields of adult education, feminist pedagogy, sociology, communication theory, and organizational theory, particularly writings addressing organizational culture. The psychological tradition offers little to our understandings of dialogic learning. Leymann (1989), in reviewing learning theories for insights into the significance of dialogue in workplace learning, notes relatively few findings in the psychological tradition dealing adequately with the issue. Gestalt psychology shows how people influence one another and their ideas about the world by working together to examine the reality around them and sharing their 'Gestalts', their perceptions, to build new Gestalts. Freud's methods point to the

importance of dialogue for generating radically new insights in individuals. Leymann himself shows that "humans have a unique capacity for generating cognitive structures through exploratory dialogue and collective problem-solving" (p. 135).

From a sociological perspective, Lazuga (1992) presents parallel concepts about learning through dialogue. He synthesizes recent writings drawing from the often called "social construction of reality" to show that knowledge is built within relationships and through conversation as individuals interact to socially construct the organization world that defines their behavior and explains the phenomena surrounding them in that organizational context. Knowledge is not absolute but context-bound, and can exist only within an "epistemic community" (p. 26). People interpret events according to socially approved categories and rules about what constitutes legitimate knowledge. Through dialogue, individuals within the collective continually negotiate their private understandings being formed from their perceptions and experiences, with the common "stock of knowledge" being constructed by the community of which they are a member. Even ignorance and uncertainty exist only in relative terms, as actors in a social community depend on others for definition of problems as well as for solutions.

Professionals' Learning Through Relationships

This negotiated, historical, and value-laden communication pattern has many implications for professionals' learning. The first presuppositional understanding in a communication act is the recognition that knowledge in educational organizations is slippery, contextualized, and the ephemeral product of individuals interacting with each other's meanings and with their own social construction of the organization's stock of meaning. The most significant implication, perhaps, is the focus placed on the critical importance of dialogic interactions among professionals and others they talk with. But these interactions are ephemeral, context-dependent, and highly interpretive. As Burge and Haughey (1993) show: "when the voices cease, what remains are individual understanding, some shared, much still unique, which each conversationalist has made of the other's words ... These understandings both construct reality and are constrained by previous constructions of the learners" (p. 106).

What actually happens in and through the process of professionals talking together to create meaning? How do relationships built through dialogue support and mediate professionals' learning about their practice? What role does relational learning play in critical reflection on practice? An objective understanding of these issues is not possible without

negating the insights into intertextuality afforded by the previous discussion. However, the following paragraphs present some responses to these questions offered by educators.

Brookfield (1987b) believes that "significant learning within personal relationships is arguably the most profound learning we experience" (p. 67), providing many positive triggers for critical reflection. In building relationships through dialogue, adults experience self-determination, growth, risk, and vulnerability. They also learn to accept and deal with feelings, and they reexamine their own behaviors. Brookfield shows how relational learning provides what he describes as three essential conditions for critical reflectivity: contextual awareness (socio-cultural processes are surfaced); reflective skepticism (roles and expectations are critically examined); and imaginative speculation (alternate ways to think and live are explored).

Communication is also made complex by personal relationships among and between those who dialogue. For example, social interactions are made complex by power relations, differing goals and needs, intelligence and communication skill, the structures and norms of discourse, conflicting communication and cognitive styles, and our sense of identity relative to our ideas and our relationships with others' in the group.

The Benefits of Conversation

The literature which re-visits the virtues of collaborative learning begins by analyzing its core, which is conversation. Any analysis of conversation must answer the following question: What possible benefits does conversation with other learners offer that the individual learner cannot realize more efficiently and effectively when liberated from the obstacles presented by social interactions? Answering this question suggests at least twelve benefits of conversation:

1. Others' views act as mirrors for our own views, opening a dialectic, helping us "unfreeze" our "meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 1990) and assumptions.

2. Others' views are springboards for our own reflections, providing fresh insights that can prompt previously silent lines of inquiry.

3. Others' views provide questions that can be turned inward to help us contemplate our own practice.

4. Others' stories and experiences (perhaps the most compelling form of sharing) raise problems we may not yet have uncovered in our own practice.

5. Others' stories help us see significance in our own similar but perhaps forgotten experiences, validating these experiences and stimulating our reflection and consideration of them and what they mean.

6. Others' stories multiply our repertoire of imaginative experiences from which to draw connections to theory. They help make the institutional meanings relevant.

7. Others' responses to our stories help us see our problems from a different perspective, illuminating questions, gaps, fuzzy thinking, and misinterpretation. These responses help clarify the organizational meanings.

8. Others' responses to our problems offer advice that assists our own search for solutions.

9. Others' responses validate our views, our choice of problems, and the direction of our inquiry.

10. Others' responses help us identify and celebrate our significant insights.

11. Others' support helps verify the universality and necessity of our confusion and pain in the learning process, motivating and encouraging us to stick with the struggle.

12. Others' support helps us venture risks and move towards the essential surrender of our fears. Risk-taking is the beginning of transformative learning.

Newman (1990) shows how meanings emerge through the "interwoven conversations" of professionals learning together in her graduate institutes. Newman's focus is community and inquiry, helping professionals uncover and explore new landscapes together. Through voicing their personal experiences and their emergent ideas of the theories they are reading, through listening to the experiences of others, and through hearing their experiences reflected back to them by others, professionals are able to make connections on many levels which construct new understandings of their practice. Dialogue in the safe and trusting atmosphere fostered by Newman is wide-ranging, embracing many aspects of teachers' lifeworlds and parts of the self as these are intimately connected to their professional practice.

The dialogue and the relationships it builds are wrapped in affect and emotion. Fears, frustrations, awe, caring, doubt, excitement, and many other feelings are generated by the learning process. These affective emotions suffuse and shape the inter-relational dynamics. The community, if it is a true dialogic community, fosters and supports the professionals' responses to these feelings, through affirmation, nurturing, and mutual trust which encourages risk-taking and sharing of the deepest insights leading to growth. It would be almost impossible to grow as an individual without the conversational community of other individuals. In the same way, organizations must rely on authentic dialogue to grow, to develop, and to progress.

The social relationships constructing and constructed by professionals' dialogue thus play a critical role in their professional learning. Assumptions are uncovered. Personal experiences and theory are interwoven. Professionals' repertoires of ways of thinking and acting in their work is enlarged through their engagement with alternate perspectives. New connections and associations are formed. New questions are raised about practice. The holistic nature of this learning is evident.

Holistic Learning through Dialogue

Griffin (1987) argues that all adult learning is holistic and embraces six parts of the self: physical, emotional, metaphoric-intuitive, spiritual, rational, and relational or dialogic. She lists many ways in which social relationships cultivate learning, many of which parallel Newman's findings. For example, Griffin suggests that social relations give support and encouragement that help erase many of the negative emotions that can accompany learning. She also suggests that social relationships help people sort out emotions through talk; and, through talk people can find ways to deal with their emotions. She suggests that dialogue helps people affirm their own ideas with others who share similar traits and ideas. She notes that dialogue helps people see different points of view and by doing so enlarges their own learning styles, alters or sharpens their own points of view, and challenges and confronts their beliefs. She notes that dialogue helps people find personal meaning in an idea that didn't seem to fit. It helps make ideas explicit and allows people to discover what they think. Dialogue encourages enthusiasm, excitement for learning, and builds the sense of community within a group by allowing confirmatory feedback. Dialogue also helps people develop the confidence they need to take risks, play with images, and new ideas. We all, Griffin states, sometimes need to talk; other times we need silence, reflection, and centring. True dialogue allows for all these things.

Melamed (1987) also writes that relational contexts must allow a sense of "play". Play, she found, is a significant mode of adult learning because it enables holistic learning. Her work was with women who "play", but Melamed extends her findings to show their application to the learning of both genders.Through play, adults question the taken-for-granted and experiment with alternatives, enabling them to move beyond 'what is' to 'what can be'. The attitude of play "works" to break down the rigid oppositional polarities that characterize dualistic perspectives of reality (win/lose, play/work, rational/ emotional, subject/object) which limit learning through their attempts to measure, predict, and control the world. Rather than an "either/or" stance constraining critical reflection and divergent thinking, relational learning promotes a "both/and" orientation. Learners are able to achieve integration of theory and practice, of their own ideas and the ideas of others, and of personal and public worlds. The cohesive bonds formed through community help learners feel connected to other people and other ideas. This connection, of community through dialogue, empowers and liberates people "from the fragmentation of ideas to interconnection and from hierarchical structures to collaborative ones" (p. 19).

Senge's work (1990) highlights the important difference between talk and true dialogue. Senge echoes Melamed's concerns for collaboration and playfulness in the sense of experimentation, encouraging people to break free from dichotomous thinking to engage in collaborative meaning-making. The purpose of dialogue, he states, is to go beyond one individual's understanding. In "participating in a pool of common meaning", he suggests, people become observers of their own thinking and become more sensitive to the incoherence in their own thoughts. He describes dialogue as a significant motivator in learning. Dialogue has the ability to allow conversors to surface each other's experiences, enabling "the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep listening to one another and a suspension of one's own views" (p. 237). Senge contrasts dialogue with "discussion". Discussion, he suggests, is a defensive form of talk where different views are presented and defended in a "ping-pong" win/lose atmosphere searching for one best view. Inquiry is thus closed and learning precluded.

Burge and Haughey (1993) found that dialogue is the necessary vehicle for establishing a learning community among their graduate professionals which "supports inquiry, exploration and choice, legitimates discomfort and conflict and celebrates insight" (p. 94). They show how professionals need to have their learning recognized and their ideas challenged through a network of relationships which establish mutual trust, reciprocal sharing, and empowerment

legitimated through sharing their personal experiences. Through dialogue in such a community, transformative learning as defined by Mezirow was enabled.

How Organizational Dialogue Can Inhibit Reflective Learning

Dialogue thus plays a critical role in professionals' learning through critical reflection. However, many practical problems inhere in the social interaction of talk, particularly in face-to-face instructional contexts, which can prevent authentic exchange and inhibit reflective learning. Some people dominate; some are passive. Some seek to satisfy social needs before learning needs. Rapport is a prerequisite for "open communication" for many, and the rapport-building trust and confirmation of reciprocal values, attitudes, and belief systems takes time to develop. Hierarchies created by differing social roles, economic or occupational status, experience, education, gender, ethnicity, and age sometimes act as subtle barriers prohibiting open exchange or reception of stories and ideas. Many professionals find it difficult to genuinely suspend judgment, then empathize and enter into another's meaning. Some negotiate status through verbiage and advocacy, both defense mechanisms protecting a learner's existing knowledge and mitigating against surrender to vulnerability and risk-taking. Others, more tentative or self-conscious in their linguistic mastery, will not venture early articulation of ephemeral connections as they emerge. Some are so uncomfortable with divergent views that they will neither challenge nor accept conflicting perspectives. Some are so consumed with their own need to articulate emerging ideas that they do not or cannot truly listen and enter the world views of others. Others may be too impatient or goal-directed to allow the natural incoherence of thought or the rhythms of digression and convergence to unfold through classroom talk, their own or others'. Many are so self-consciously programmed by social norms dictating a continual flow of *something* in dialogic interactions, even chatter, that they are exceedingly uncomfortable with the silences necessary for reflection during learning conversations. Meanwhile, the flow of talk in organizational dialogue constructs a web of meaning which can trap and control the thinking of the talkers.

Ideology Created Through Talk Reproduces Limiting Beliefs

Marsick and Watkins (1990) show how the nature of socially constructed reality constrains professionals' learning. Through talk, shared expectations, values, and beliefs are created -- sometimes without critical examination. A resulting system of ideology is reified. This ideology then acts to shape people's perception of experience and influences their

attributions about the meanings and motives of others. Certain professional codes and standards affect the communal creation of deeply structured assumptions. Argyris (1993) states: "individuals are walking social structures. The socialization is so extensive and efficient that individuals will normally not act in ways to undermine it. They can be left alone because they are programmed with automatic responses ... most individuals are unaware of their own causal contribution to these organization features" (p. 36).

Critical theorists who address organizational communication structures echo these concerns. Their work focuses on and outlines the mutual creation, through talk, of an ideology which reproduces relations of domination. These relations limit the individual's ability to "see beyond" the consensually constructed meanings, assumptions, and norms and to envision alternate choices of action in a learning process. Deetz and Karsten (1983) show that an organization's ideology, created through talk, supports and legitimizes the existing social order, masking contradictions by the exclusion or the granting of meaning. Ideology hides its own role in creating an illusory reality out of social construction. Ideology controls by creating a consensus which is continually reinforced. Ideology also distorts communication because it determines what constitutes a rational argument, arguable issues, appropriate topics, and how events are to be interpreted. As a result of talk that reifies ideological structure, the taken-for-granted reality is protected from critical examination.

From a radical structuralist perspective, McLaren (1989) claims that hegemony is produced in organizations. This hegemony creates the domination of school members through consensual social practices, forms, and structures. The production and representation of ideology, dominant ideas, values, and beliefs and the manner in which these are expressed and lived out by both individuals and groups helps organize and bring to consciousness a sense of the world. However, this sense of the world is selectively exclusive. The organization's ideology legitimates certain truths and power relations; reifies certain events, values, and experiences; fragments the personal from the system and divides people into asymmetrically ordered groups; and structures the systems in a way which masks the power relations and distorts the realities. Minority groups and individuals distinguished by gender, class, race-ethnicity, age, and able-bodiedness are oppressed in organizations through marginalization; and, often, these people unknowingly consent and participate in their own oppression.

Ellsworth (1989) argues that these silenced people can never truly speak or be heard in a discourse underpinned by absolute, universal propositions and moral principles embedded in the exclusive ideology governing today's culture at large. This ideology and the rational discourse reproducing it function in dialogue to preclude the subjective, partial knowings of

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those "others" whose interests and language are not represented in the realities named by rationalism.

Language and Perspective Distortions Prevent Critical Reflection

Mezirow (1990) points to the ways ideology distorts people's meaning perspectives when they accept social beliefs and values uncritically. He distinguishes three main types of such distortions which are affected directly or indirectly by dominant ideologies:

1. Epistemic distortions: These epistemic distortions include the beliefs that every problem has a correct solution, that phenomena produced by social interaction are immutable and beyond human control, and that descriptive knowledge is prescriptive.

2. Socio-cultural distortions: These socio-cultural distortions create taken-for-granted beliefs that legitimate asymmetrical power relations, unjust social practice, dependency-producing institutions, and regulations of exploitation, exclusion, and domination supporting the status quo.

3. Psychic distortions: These psychic distortions include anxieties and other inhibiting feelings blocking experimentation with alternative choices and actions.

Marsick and Watkins (1990) show how communication difficulties, specifically the frequent discrepancy between what one intends to communicate and what others hear, represent a pervasive problem in professionals' informal or incidental learning. When people don't make their meanings explicit and when inferences from interpersonal interactions are constructed entirely at a tacit level, people attribute meanings and motives to others which may or may not parallel the others' understandings of the transaction. The resulting learning is private and highly subjective, reinforcing taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs. Argyris (1985) terms this incorrect reasoning and describes a tri-level hierarchy of inferences to represent the tacit reasoning of people interpreting each other's speech and actions:

3. Theories about what produced these meanings
2. Cultural meanings imposed by us
1. Directly observable data

Theories constructed from inferences that are never made explicit through talk remain contradictory, ambiguous, and under-comprehensive. If these theories are not subjected to the vigorous analysis produced by surfacing these causal inferences, or subjecting these hidden premises to continual tests in the world of practice, these theories can be faulty and reinforce

dysfunctional loops of thinking. Argyris shows that such theories govern the way people frame and solve problems in an organization, and thus perpetuate error-producing mechanisms which become entrenched in the organization's taken-for-granted reality. People become defensive about their implicit 'theories -in-use', protecting these basic premises guiding their action by covering them up to protect themselves from embarrassment and threat. The result is "conditions of undiscussability, self-fulfilling prophecies, self-sealing processes, and escalating error.... [which] reinforce vagueness, lack of clarity, inconsistency, and incongruity" (Argyris, 1993, p.30). These conditions cement the underlying assumptions and beliefs creating these conditions as people strive for control, suppression of negative feelings, a sense of behaving "rationally", and personal success through maximizing winning and minimizing failure. At a tacit level, the resulting paradoxes in people's thinking, the gaps between their espoused theory and their problematic theory-in-use, and the unintended dysfunctional consequences resulting from their own embedded premises will continue to imprison their action and prevent their learning.

Story-Telling Preserves Taken-for-Granted Assumptions

Mumby (1988, 1989) argues that organizational ideology is created and articulated thorough narrative: "Stories are an exceptionally powerful means of constructing and maintaining an organization's underlying mode of rationality, providing a vision of the organization which is relatively complete, stable, and removed from scrutiny. In this sense, narrative has a legitimacy beyond other forms of discourse, attaining a level of authority that excludes it from the normal rigors of discursive validity testing" (p. 125).

When people tell stories, they exercise a high degree of selectivity in the choice of story to tell and in the details to reveal. These details are arranged to fit accepted story structures, to suit the needs of the audience, and to fit the context of the telling. Time is compressed or expanded, events are reconstrued to highlight the particular point the teller strives to impress upon the audience, and story elements such as dialogue, humor, suspense, and descriptive details are interpolated on the remembered experience to create a performance conforming to the social expectations.

Crites (1986) notes the illusion of causality created through story-telling: hindsight can impose a sense of causal necessity on events not necessarily linked and foresight creates a teleological, intentional pull of the future. Story structures are built on conflict, pitting a protagonist against an antagonist in a dilemma which is ultimately resolved in a denoument. Error is rationalized, conflict is resolved, the unknown is explained, and tensions are smoothed

away. Paradoxes are simplified through the privileging of certain details; contradictory details are made to disappear through omission. Thus the story provides closure and containment for ambiguous or confusing experiences, creating a sense of determinacy and stability, and imposing an apparent order on the fragments of experience which legitimates the story-teller's perception and representation of these experiences.

Stories create a powerful experience for listeners. Social norms demand a "willing suspension of disbelief", where participants engage and identify with the story characters and their plot rather than maintain a critical distance. Bormann (1983) stresses the willingness of this participation, arising from the human tendency to want to understand events in terms of people enacting purposive scenarios. He states that stories answer everyone's needs to structure confusing here-and-now experiences in meaningful ways. Bormann also identifies various forms of fantasy-building created and shared consensually that form an organization's ontology and epistemology. Stories are constructed in the listener's mind through images, which are impressed in the memory in powerful ways. Listeners are thus psychologically and emotionally drawn in to a cathartic experience where critical reflection is set aside. The teller becomes the author of reality, controlling the construction of events which then become part of the group's shared consciousness. Stories contain the enactment and resolution of the organization's tensions and contradictions. They co-opt the listener to accept the dominant reading, thus reproducing the existing values and structural power relations preventing critically reflective learning.

Power Relations Prevent Authentic Exchange

Feminist pedagogy analysing power imbalances produced in the discussions of academic classrooms can help shed light on the functions of power in dialogic learning situations in the workplace, both formal and informal. Ellsworth (1989) argues that authentic democratic dialogue in its conventional sense in today's communities is impossible (p. 108), because gendered, classed, and raced power relations between people distort communication. Not all voices carry equal legitimation in a typical setting for dialogue, where rational discourse preserves politics and silences or marginalizes positions which challenge the dominant narrative governing the organizational talk. She points specifically to the authority of teachers, constructed by ideologies containing prejudices and partial interests, mitigating against the ideals of "community" through dialogue: equality, safety, trust, risk, and legitimacy of all voices. Maher and Tetreault (1992) also locate oppressive authority in various forms in the teacher's role in discussion: as the expert, the evaluator, the resource, and the facilitator. Tisdell (1993) explores ways that power relations are naturally exercised in dialogue at a tacit

level which must be surfaced and made explicit before genuine communication and learning can occur. She cites Gardner's research to show how even when teachers attempts to "relinquish" their authority roles, relational politics constructed by prevailing social ideologies and dynamics surface to privilege traditionally dominant voices. Knowledge becomes the source of power used to silence others.

Lewis (1990) shows how gendered hierarchies and its attendant practices mitigate against free and open exchange. She finds that patriarchal relations and phallocentric ideologies create certain psychological, social, and sexual dynamics which function to reproduce a dialogic politic privileging dominant voices and narratives. Assymetrical power relations are maintained by all participants. Marginal voices are caught in "the double bind of needing to speak and to remain silent at the same time in order to guarantee some measure of survival" (p. 481).

Ellsworth (1989) is concerned that this double bind is not addressed adequately by critical pedagogy, and that power imbalances are recreated even in feminist classrooms striving to reconfigure prevailing hierarchies. She emphasizes that all knowings are partial, including the teacher's, and must somehow be granted legitimate space to speak. Such space does not occur naturally simply by creating a safe, warm, trusting climate, despite the common mythology embraced by writers such as Tarule (1988) who insist that "cooperative or collaborative discussions about ideas" (p.21) are possible. Ellsworth argues for a "pedagogy of the unknowable" in which a multiplicity of "contradictory, partial, and irreducible" knowledges (p. 112), enacted through polarized affinity groups, are encouraged to name, fight, and survive their differences. Tisdell (1993) cites Bell Hooks' similar model of feminist pedagogy which argues for confrontational classroom conditions encouraging marginalized voices to speak: "Unlike the stereotypical model that suggests women best come to voice in an atmosphere of safety (one in which we are all going to be kind and nurturing), I encourage students to work at coming to voice in an atmosphere where they may be afraid or see themselves at risk" (Tisdell, 1993, p. 100).

Like Ellsworth, Maher and Tetreault (1992) also indicate that the conception of knowledge as universal and absolute and thus situated "outside" the knowers, often in the expertise of the teacher as ultimate knower or interpreter of the "legitimate" worldview, reproduces power relations enforcing learner dependency. The traditional goal of pedagogy is "mastery: an understanding of the truth of a work, what it really means, and thus an ability to dominate or control it" (p. 58). "Mastery" recreates a power-dependency cycle divorcing learners from their own personal, practical knowledge and rewarding rational, objective

learning. Thus other kinds of learning are tacitly understood as "irrational". These other knowings include the relational, intuitive, emotional, physical, and moral or spiritual realms of the lifeworld which fully effective students or professionals must connect to their practice through their learning. But there is no language to surface and narrate such knowings in rational discourse. They are de-legitimized through the continuing authority of discourse reifying and reproducing a false worldview that is universal and objective. Thus truly reflective learning becomes a site for struggle and resistance against the essential dialogic condition of the classroom or the workplace.

Towards Organizations That Foster Learning Through Talk

The irony and paradox of talk is apparent. Authentic communication is a key element in the growth of any organization; yet the ideology, language and perspective distortions, story-telling, and power relations structuring organizational talk can reinforce the dominant and stifling ideological hegemony of the organization, militating against the very growth that comes about through communication. In the face of such a paradox, what can be done to truly liberate professionals' reflective learning? The following paragraphs suggest four ways: (1) develop administrators' awareness; (2) deconstruct the organization's narrative; (3) promote a learning organization; and (4) create a truly collaborative community.

Develop Administrators' Awareness

Administrators first need to be aware of the influence which their own patterns of talk and behavior have upon the learning orientation of their organization. Smircich (1983) states that the administrator's role is one of "shaping and maintaining patterns of meaning that are consistent with particular values" (p. 238). Haughey (1993) agrees, showing that the administrator's talk intervenes at the point of tension between the natural fragmentation of an organization (created by diverse individual interests and constructions) and the organization's attempt at unity (seeking cooperative action, shared missions, and values), to alter the patterns of meaning, forged through talk, forming the organization's reality. She draws attention to the ethical dimension implied by this concept, for if meaning in schools is largely created through the web of stories, the administrator's own use of narrative discourse wields considerable power in creating this meaning.

Deconstruct the Organization's Narrative

The administrator's talk can influence the stories creating the shared meanings of an organization. The administrator's talk can also be interrupted in conversation to problematize the accepted interpretation and expose the dominant ideological meaning. Mumby (1988) urges a deconstructive critique of organizational narrative, helping people become aware of the extent to which their organizational reality is a human, discursive construct reproducing certain interests and values. His suggestions for the researcher working to emancipate organizational members from hegemonic ideologies can be appropriated and adapted for administrative action, to articulate and question the dominant interpretations of experience grounded in professionals' stories through a stance of disjuncture and resistance to these interpretations, and to encourage new readings and new stories.

Smircich and Calas (1987) also emphasize deconstruction as the way to challenge the power of the prevailing organizational narrative. They advocate a "resistance" of the dominant narrative which "suspects and defers acceptance of any notion as truth" (p. 248), taking apart accepted meanings, recognizing the illusions of reality constructed in the "presences" of discursive constructs, and examining the omissions, the "absences" existing in the margins and backgrounds of the stories, thus moving towards reconstruction of new meanings.

Promote a Learning Organization

Loughlin and Mott (1992) found that models of women's ways of knowing are relevant in understanding the learning needs and processes of professionals of both genders. Their concern is to facilitate the development of integrated professional identities, a tolerance of ambiguity, the capacity to take risks, and the propensity to reflect critically on practice. Their findings suggest three implications for organizations and educators committed to enabling professionals' reflective learning: (1) help centre learners' knowing within their authentic self; (2) help develop a connected and experientially focused language within the learning process; and (3) create a context of relatedness among learners (p. 86). Administrators can help professionals create knowledge for themselves by encouraging and modeling interpersonal and organizational talk which enables four basic modes of active engagement:

(a) revisiting their own experiences to seek their own values and understandings about practice, and "problematizing" these experiences to uncover questions about their actions and their beliefs;

(b) building theory from their own practice by addressing fundamental questions, juxtaposing their practice with issues and insights uncovered by comparing theoretical perspectives, and entering into stories shared by others;

(c) solving problems emerging from their own practice through a variety of means: trial and error, observing models, learning new strategies, accepting responses, reflecting on the problem-solving process, and finally

(d) developing a critically reflective, creative, proactive stance towards their learning-in-practice, so that their inquiry continues naturally as they continue to raise issues about the outcomes of their decisions, to probe the assumptions underlying their behavior, to seek collaboration with colleagues for responses to their own ideas and experiences, to understand the ideas and experiences of others and apply these to their own reflections about practice, and to become comfortable taking risks and making mistakes in their journey as reflective practitioners.

The dominant activity fostering the creation of this knowledge is conversation, whether personal and critical reflections about experiences and feelings, intellectual comparisons of theoretical perspectives and attempts to anchor these into one's own experience, or dialogic exchanges, responses, and the building of stories and ideas with others'. Senge (1990) emphasizes the role of the leader in fostering a "learning organization" to produce the creative tension between the current reality and an alternate vision. By surfacing people's "mental models", helping people express and challenge their assumptions, restructure their views of reality to see the underlying causes of problems, balancing inquiry and advocacy in dialogue, creating a sense of purpose, and communicating a vision, the leader opens new possibilities for shaping the future. The leader is thus the primary agent for invoking what Senge calls "generative" learning, whereby professionals recognize inaccurate assumptions which create systems that control events and cause problems. The feminist perspective would critique the power-dependency relations implied by Senge's notion of the leader as primary motivator and sustainer of reflective learning. However, as Tisdell (1993) noted in Gardner's research, when an authority figure central to the organization's structure (as a teacher is to a classroom, so an administrative leader is to a workplace) is removed, hierarchical power relations are reproduced anyway through dialogic interactions, by displacing the power source onto another authority such as knowledge. Ellsworth (1989) notes that such an entrenched authority cannot be denied, so should be employed to facilitate an equitable community.

Create a Truly Collaborative Community

The concept of a collaborative professional "community" has emerged repeatedly in the writings about learning through dialogue cited in the discussion above. The notion of a workplace learning forum which provides professionals with encouragement, opportunities for open sharing, synergistic idea-building, and the satisfaction of belonging to a like-minded club is most inviting. But as Ellsworth, Lewis, and Tisdell have shown, such ideals may not only be impossible, but clinging to them may reproduce the very double binds and power imbalances which oppresses. How can community be created without silencing the very talk voicing personal narratives, connecting these to public worlds and experiences, and hearing the multiple partial, contradictory knowings so essential to critical reflection?

First, participants in a community need to be aware of the tacit assumptions and attitudes guiding their behavior in social interactions. When subtle obstacles accruing from socialized norms governed by differences in such things as status or gender role are surfaced and discussed, they lose their power. Facilitators or administrators can help professionals become alert to role relations and socialized attitudes constraining authentic participation. Administrators must be sensitive to and aware of ways professionals interact, and find ways to respond to individuals through one-on-one chats and written informal messages.

Second, organizations need clear expectations for reflective, collaborative talk, and reinforce this expectation through example and by direct invitation. Concrete opportunities can be provided for groups to work through organization-wide instructional issues or specific problems identified by professionals, and the necessary time must be made available for professionals to talk together in varied groupings.

Third, strategies for sharing and listening can be modeled and even taught explicitly by facilitators. Administrators or facilitators can place themselves in groups as a non-directive participant, deliberately modeling strategies of listening, responding to others, asking questions, and remaining alert to all possible learning opportunities in each communicative encounter. Constant reinforcement of collaborative skills, through deliberate modeling, explicit teaching, reminders, and feedback is sometimes necessary. Some of the most important communication skills that help create effective learning communities are listening deeply and responding directly to others' ideas, asking others for clarification, being willing to share feelings and even partially-formed personal ideas and stories, checking for others' understanding of these ideas, acknowledging and "championing" others' contributions,

checking for agreement, actively disagreeing in non-threatening ways, elaborating in meaningful ways on others' contributions, inviting others to talk, mediating between opposing perspectives, sharing feelings, showing appreciation, and periodically summarizing emerging themes.

Fourth, administrators can actively encourage professionals' shared reflection on the dialogic process itself, constantly reinforcing the link between the conversation and the questions it raises for professionals about their own practice and learning problems. Power imbalances can be problematized at the moment of enactment. Perspective and language distortions can be surfaced and examined explicitly as they occur. Borrowing from techniques used in academic classrooms and workshops promoting transformative learning, facilitators or administrators can adopt the habit of probing professional conversations and encouraging their staff to do the same, asking: 'What just happened here?' 'How did you respond?' 'What question does this raise for you?' This kind of on-going "processing" or immediate reflection on conversations is an orientation, rather than a discrete activity, that can be embedded in any dialogue. Time must be allowed. Reflective time is needed in the short-term immediately following communicative learning encounters; and, 'patient' time in the long-term giving professionals the necessary space to internalize and develop the habit of reflecting on their own. Professionals need to be committed to the importance of such reflective processing, and to allow themselves time for it.

Fifth, and most important in many ways, the literature reviewed in the sections above suggests that a climate of trust is a crucial factor in building community. Trust helps remove the sense of urgency, unwillingness to disclose, advocacy, self-protective defensiveness, and sometimes anxiety and competition that can pervade group talk. Professionals need to feel a sense of safety and mutual support in order to verbalize the stories revealing problems they're struggling with, the mistakes they're making, the fears and anxiety as well as the moments of joy and pride they experience daily in their classrooms. Trust creates the security which allows professionals to risk experimenting and to play with alternatives.

When facilitating dialogic encounters, administrators and facilitators need to be willing to take risks themselves, to model a genuine openness, to share their own hunches and feelings and half-formed thinking, and to actively invite participants to risk voicing their intuitive and affective responses. To promote the stance of inquiry characterizing a community built on trust, administrators need to demonstrate their own commitment to listening. When administrators and facilitators actively encourage divergent views, inviting the less-vocal participants to talk, and building on teachers' ideas with a "both/and" orientation rather than implying an "either/or"

stance, they help build the trust that will enable professionals to say what they think and mean what they say.

Foster Critical Reflection

Critical reflection enables professionals to unearth problems in their taken-for-granted reality, question their tacit assumptions and beliefs implicit in the way they function, and test these against new insights and forge new understandings. The professional is privileged as prime knower, as competent seeker, and as creator of knowledge within a personal frame of reference. The goal of critical reflection is liberation from patterns of thinking and behavior which have previously led to unintended or undesirable outcomes and the reframing of routines and deep meaning structures which prevented effective action. But to make liberation a possibility, the professional must accept the personal power that permits new choices, must change the underlying conditions that shape their beliefs, and must experiment with new ways of solving problems most disturbing to them in their practice. Professionals who seek to grow must critically work to assess their own ways of thinking and their own reality. The process of dissolving and reconstructing reality to find one's blind spots, to confront these blind spots, and to explore alternative choices is actualized through conversation.

Newman's (1990) techniques can be appropriated by professionals. The central question to ask at every opportunity is "What is going on here?" Professionals can prompt themselves to stop and reflect on their conversations, bringing into consciousness the observable interaction, the meaning they imputed to that transaction, the assumptions guiding that meaning, the gaps between these assumptions and other perspectives, and the implication for their own practice. The next step is to ask, "What questions does this raise about your own practice?" 'This' might have been any type of conversational transaction: the learner's internal or articulated dialogue with a snip of small group discussion, a surprising point of view, a co-learner's narrated experience, a problem related to their practice which they are struggling to solve, or a response to their actions from other professionals or students.

When professionals internalize these questions to turn this reflective inquiry on themselves, they attend to and probe subtle surprises, they are alert to their own inferences, and they test their own assumptions. They can learn to rely on themselves as competent seekers and trust their colleagues as friendly co-inquirers. They can find freedom from the fear of being judged for their blind spots and the gaps between their beliefs and their actions, fears of losing professional esteem and personal identity as they surrendered their world views to critical scrutiny, fears which can produce the facade of control and the stance of rigid advocacy

preventing transformation of personal perspectives. As professionals gain confidence and comfort with the 'unfreezing' of their old cognitive frames, they form new perspectives, more inclusive, permeable, discriminating, and integrative.

Summary

How can the reflective, continuous learning of professionals be fostered in the workplace? The answer, quite simply, is to communicate through dialogue. The literature points to the potential promise of communication over and over again. When professionals are encouraged to surface and legitimize their personal experience, through the expressive language of their own narratives, authentic links can be made between the public world of rational theory and the private landscapes of lived experience. Dialogic relations in a community dedicated to reflective learning supports integration of all facets of the professionals in the process of coming-to-know their practice. In the cognitive domain, alternate perspectives named through dialogue can also provide the trigger for reflection-in-practice producing new knowledge and skills, or critical thinking about assumptions which create more integrative, permeable, discriminating, and inclusive 'meaning perspectives'.

But the literature also points out a paradox. Communication can stagnate the growth of an organization just as quickly as it can encourage it. Non-reflective talk can perpetuate dysfunctional patterns of thinking, reproducing taken-for granted beliefs and ways of posing and solving problems which limit rather than liberate professionals. Dialogue governed by current dominant rhetorics reifies formal knowledge and reproduces an hegemonic ideology which inhibits reflective learning. Ideology created through talk reproduces limiting beliefs, language and perspective distortions prevent critical reflection, story-telling preserves taken-for-granted assumptions, and power relations inherent in current dialogic patterns suppress authentic exchange.

What is the answer for organizations and professionals committed to reflective learning? This paper reviews the literature on professionals' ways of knowing, critical reflection, and the process of dialogue to suggest five steps. First, to suppress or eliminate the barriers to reflective continuous learning, administrators must recognize the basic difference between talk that stagnates and dialogue that stimulates in their organizations, and become aware of their own powerful influence in maintaining controlling ideologies. Second, professionals and administrators need to actively deconstruct their own and their organization's narratives to surface gaps, contradictions, embedded power imbalances and limiting assumptions. Third, professionals and administrators can promote a learning

organization by expressing and challenging these assumptions, dissolving and restructuring their views of reality to see the underlying causes of problems, and balancing inquiry and advocacy in dialogue. Fourth, all can work to create a truly collaborative community. Such a community is built upon trust and risk, maintaining clear expectations for reflective, collaborative talk and making space for the partial multiple knowings of participants. Finally, critical reflection can be continually and actively fostered, by deliberately implementing strategies such as those outlined in the preceding section.

When professionals consider deeply what they know and how they come to know it through talk, they can prepare a considered plan of action for their own reflective learning. When they work thoughtfully with others they can build the kind of dialogic learning community that will stimulate and support collaborative growth. Hopefully, this paper has outlined a process for taking some initial steps toward these important goals.

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